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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2006

A QUICK LOOK AT THE TURKISH PRESS
May 11, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turks Lobby in Paris against Armenian "Genocide" Draft
All papers continue coverage of Turkish efforts in the face of a controversial Armenian "genocide" bill that will be considered by the French Parliament on May 18. On Wednesday, a Turkish parliamentary delegation of the ruling and opposition parties, in Paris to lobby against the bill, met with the French Parliament Speaker Jean-Louis Debre. The Turkish delegation reportedly pointed to the calls for the boycott of French goods in Turkey, stressing bilateral ties would be harmed if the draft becomes a law, making the denial of Armenian "genocide" a crime. Some renowned Turkish intellectuals including Turkish Armenians Etyen Mahcupyan and Hrant Dink, professors Baskin Oran, Halil Berktag and Murat Belge, and novelist Elif Shafak said in an advertisement published in Liberation such a bill would block free discussions both in France and Turkey, disrupting the "questioning of historical and common memory." "We, the citizens of Turkey, feel the burden of the inhuman calamity which Ottoman Armenians were subjected to. We share their pain. No one can deny the ruthless acts of 1915. As the Armenian conference in Istanbul in September last year revealed, the ongoing democratization process in Turkey can enlighten the 90-year darkness. The draft law to be debated by the French parliament will obstruct free discussions both in France and Turkey. Today, both parties are far from conveying their views to the one another. Armenian efforts supporting laws restricting freedom of expression in response to the Turkish state's policy of denial can spark stricter disagreements. Therefore, we call on Armenians not to make a mistake which will be quite difficult to correct in the future," the advertisement said. Turkish papers report Prime Minister Erdogan said he was "confident" that

France would "not make a wrong move".

Writing in Radikal, Murat Yetkin observed that an embargo against French goods in Turkey would "have legal and economic consequences for Ankara not for Paris." He urges "wise men" to "stand up with wisdom, common sense and knowledge and make their voices heard" so that Turkey will admit that regarding the Armenian issue, "the emperor has no clothes and that the current policy cannot even be called a policy."

MFA Denies Gul Will Visit Iran

Radikal, Yeni Safak report Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan has rejected reports that during a recent visit to Ankara, Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani gave Turkey documents proving meetings between US officials and PKK militants in Iraq took place. Tan also rejected press reports that Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul would pay a visit to Iran.

Asli Aydintasbas comments in Sabah that Iran is in the middle of a "serious global public relation offensive," which appears to be "rather successful." Aydintasbas notes that by launching operations against the PKK and accusing the US of having contacts with the PKK, "Iran scored a goal against the US in Turkey's arena." She concludes that with this public relations campaign, Iran is building "step by step" the infrastructure to position itself to "bargain with the US face to face" and that "that was the main reason for Larijani's visit to Ankara."

New "Danistay" Head Warns against Fundamentalism, Criticizes AKP

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Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman and others: The newly-elected head of the Council of State (Danistay) Sumru Cortoglu warned the ruling AK Party in a ceremony yesterday against partisan appointments to public posts, judicial rulings, and threats to secularism. She said some fundamentalist groups were threatening Turkey's constitutional order, stressing that religious freedoms could be restricted to protect public life and secular values. Cortoglu also strongly criticized a regulation which will bring changes in the bureaucracy in the case of the appointment of a new government. Prime Minister Erdogan shrugged off the warnings, saying similar speeches had been delivered at each Turkish judicial institution ceremony.

Turkey-Greek "Dogfight" in Aegean

All papers report Turkish jetfighters and helicopters participating in search and rescue maneuvers in the international waters of the Aegean were harassed by Greek warplanes yesterday. Turkey sent jetfighters to the region, prompting a dogfight between Turkish and Greek planes that went on until the end of the exercises in the first air confrontation between the two sides since March 21. Papers recall that in a recent meeting in Sofia, Turkish and Greek foreign ministers Gul and Bakoyannis had agreed to set up an emergency phone line to prevent dogfights in the Aegean.

Sezer Vetoes Pensions Bill

All papers: President Ahmet Necdet Sezer has vetoed an IMF-backed pensions and health insurance reform bill which was to raise the retirement age gradually to 65 from the current 58-60 and introduce universal health insurance as part of a package to overhaul Turkey's social security system. A statement from Sezer's office said 65 was too high a retirement age in a country with an average life expectancy of 66. The IMF wants the reforms to be passed by the Turkish parliament before it launches a review to release the next tranche of a USD 10 billion loan package. Papers comment the veto might add to negative market sentiment generated by a court decision suspending the sale of the state-owned steel maker Erdemir.

TV Highlights
NTV, 8.00 a.m.

Domestic News

- PM Erdogan traveled to Austria on Wednesday to participate in the EU-Latin America Summit in Vienna. Erdogan will move on to Indonesia on May 13 for the D-8 summit, which Iranian and Nigerian presidents, Malaysian and Pakistani prime ministers, and the Egyptian foreign minister will also attend.

- The main opposition CHP did not join the parliamentary subcommittee to discuss the controversial anti-terror bill in a move designed to protest Article 6 of the bill which, many believe, will pave the way for the release of the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan.

- Former members of Turkish Prime Ministry human rights advisory board, professors Ibrahim Kaboglu and Baskin Oran, were acquitted in a lawsuit filed against them for their report on Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey.

- Police detained four suspected PKK terrorists, seizing five Kalashnikov rifles in the Aegean port city of Izmir.

International News

- Joost Hiltermann, Middle East analyst at the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, called on Washington to

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intervene to solve the Kirkuk problem before it is "too late."

- President Bush said on Wednesday his younger brother Jeb, the Governor of Florida, would make "a great president for the United States."

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